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ABSTRACT

This booklet answers parents' questions about the following: Kentucky's Writing Portfolio program, the process which leads to effective writing, and the parent's role in the development of children's writing skills. The first section discusses the stages of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) and how parents can help their children at each step of the process. The next section lists the required elements and pieces that writing students are to include in the 4th-, 7th-, and 12th-grade writing portfolios. The next section discusses the portfolio scoring guide and how parents can help students improve their writing. The booklet then presents the most asked questions and their answers regarding the Kentucky Writing Portfolio. Names and addresses of Kentucky Writing Program consultants and Writing Portfolio consultants are attached. (RS)

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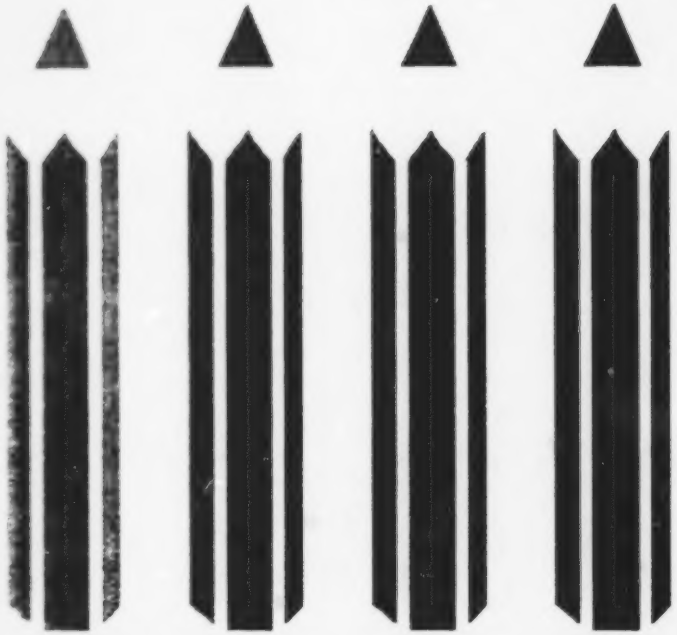
Sharpen Your Child's WRITING SKILLS



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A Guidebook for Kentucky Parents

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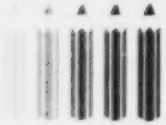

Sharpen Your Child's WRITING SKILLS

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A Guidebook for Kentucky Parents

Points for Parents

Is your refrigerator covered with your children's best school work? Have you saved samples of your children's best efforts as they have grown? If so, you will understand completely many of the benefits of *Kentucky's Writing Portfolio.*

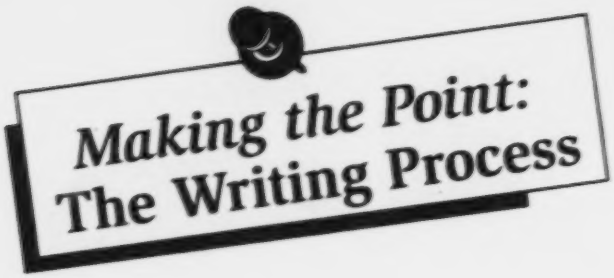
Examining student work is valuable to everyone involved in a child's education. Collections of this work, in the form of a portfolio, show us student understanding, achievement, and growth — as well as how curriculum and instruction are working. Kentucky schools are emphasizing student writing to improve thinking and learning for all students.

The goal of instruction is to help students develop life-long learning skills and the confidence to make use of those skills. For many of us, writing in school was a limiting, and sometimes unpleasant, experience. As adults, we have come to realize that our previous writing instruction did not always prepare us for the types of real-world writing we are now required to do. With positive developmental writing instruction, our children will not experience the same frustration.

We, as parents and teachers, know the ability to communicate is important. Kentucky teachers realize the importance of teaching effective communication skills for success in today's world. The support and involvement of parents like you is necessary to make sure our children become effective thinkers and confident communicators — **keys to a successful future for us all.**

A committee of Kentucky teachers and other educators was charged with the task of defining the state's writing portfolio. Their responsibility was to ensure that your child and all other students throughout the state receive the same rich, varied learning opportunities. As you read the following pages, we hope you will find answers to your questions about the following:

- *Kentucky's Writing Portfolio*
- The process which leads to effective writing
- Your role in the development of your child's writing skills



Making the Point: The Writing Process

Grinding pencil sharpeners, tapping computer keys, rustling paper, and the sounds of students reading their writing aloud to one another are common sounds you will hear when you visit P-12 classrooms in Kentucky. Teachers are changing their instruction to emphasize writing and the writing process. Parents want to know more about those changes.

The writing process may be defined as a series of stages (processes) that writers engage in to produce a final product (finished writing). During this writing process, writers explore and rethink their work continuously.

STAGES	ACTIVITIES
PREWRITING	getting ready to write, generating ideas, planning
DRAFTING	putting words on paper
REVISING	making it clear and complete
EDITING	correcting, making it right
PUBLISHING	sharing with others

While the majority of your child's writing takes place in a school setting, writing begins at home. Long before children have mastered the skill of putting pen to paper, they write because it is fun. Parents can help keep this interest alive without taking over ownership of the child's writing.

Writers also require feedback at all stages of the writing process. One type of feedback occurs when writers talk with others about their writing. This conversation, known as conferencing, is essential to improving writing skills. The sections entitled "How Can Parents Help?" include conferencing suggestions.

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How Can Parents Help?

- question rather than dictate
- coach rather than correct
- encourage rather than edit
- guide rather than direct

PREWRITING

The first stage in the writing process includes the activities, experiences and exercises which motivate writers to begin the first draft. During this time writers consider the purpose (real reason) for writing and the audience (the intended reader/listener) for whom they are writing. If prewriting is successful, writers will have a clear sense of direction for their writing and many ideas for supporting the purpose. This planning stage is vital for producing effective writing.

How Can Parents Help?

- Provide opportunities for observation and critical thinking (cultural experiences, outdoor activities, trips, films, educational television programs, etc.).
- Read with your child and provide access to books, newspapers, and magazines (at home and/or in the community library).
- Encourage your child to be curious about what is going on in the world.
- Help your child find a real reason to write
  - — to inform (e.g., create a family letter to friends and relatives)
  - — to persuade (e.g., convince parents to allow a privilege)
  - — to entertain (e.g., create a play for others to perform)
- Help your child identify topics/subjects of interest.
- Invite discussion topics.
- Encourage listing, notetaking, jotting down ideas, brainstorming, etc.
- Be an active listener. Ask questions to clarify and make helpful comments.
- Suggest possible audiences (relatives, other children, public officials, community leaders, school officials, etc.)
- Discuss different forms of writing (letter, poem, article, story, play, etc.)

DRAFTING

During the drafting stage, the writer produces the first draft (written copy). The most important emphasis here is getting the thinking on paper.

How Can Parents Help?

- Provide a quiet work place for your child to write and a variety of resource tools.
- Ask and answer questions regarding content.
  - What is your purpose?
  - Who is your audience?
  - Why are you writing this?
  - What is the assignment?
- Respect your child's ability to make the appropriate choices and resist the temptation to take over the project.
- Encourage your child to return to prewriting when "writer's block" occurs.

REVISING

During the revision stage the writer revisits and shares with others a piece of writing in order to determine what needs to be added, removed, and/or rearranged. Revision is not recopying an assignment neatly in ink or correcting grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Instead, the writer focuses on strengthening content and meeting the needs of the audience.

How Can Parents Help?

- Listen while your child reads the piece aloud and respond in some of the following ways:
  - "The sentence or word that stands out for me is _____."
  - "The part that is most interesting to me is _____."
  - "I'd like to know more about _____."

- Offer praise about parts of the writing which work well.
- Ask questions about the purpose, meaning, content, ideas, and organization.
  - "Does the writing say what you want it to say?"
  - "What changes do you think you need to make?"
  - "Can you tell me more about _____?"
  - "Can you give me an example of _____?"
- Tell your child what you heard the piece of writing say.
- Encourage talk about the changes and the reasons for them.
- Ask questions about any part of the writing you find unclear.
- Make sure your child has the final say in all revisions of the writing.

EDITING

Editing is the job of cleaning up the writing and eliminating errors (mistakes in grammar, punctuation, usage, capitalization, and spelling). Writers may need assistance from others during this process to strengthen writing skills. Correctness is important; however, editing is a developmental (growth) process. Correcting every error can be overwhelming to the writer. As writers become more proficient, they will make fewer mistakes.

How Can Parents Help?

- Ask your child to read the piece aloud while you both look at the writing. Focus attention on correctness of sentences, wording, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- Concentrate on only one or two types of errors at a time.
- Encourage the use of a dictionary, thesaurus, spell checker, and/or computer writing program.
- Allow your child to make the actual corrections on the writing.
- Do not at any time actually do your child's writing or make direct corrections on the work. You might decide to circle or place a check beside words or phrases which appear to be incorrect. Your child can look up the word and make the final decision.

PUBLISHING

Publishing is the process of making a piece of writing public. Writers recognize the value of their writing when they share it with an audience in a variety of ways.

How Can Parents Help?

- Provide publishing opportunities.
  - — Mail a letter.
  - — Post on a bulletin board or your refrigerator.
  - — Submit to a magazine or newspaper.
  - — Read aloud at family gatherings, like the dinner table.
- Provide necessary materials (pens and pencils, stamps, envelopes, different kinds of paper, etc.).
- Encourage your child to make the writing neat and legible.
- Share your writing with your child.
- Allow your child to decide when to share pieces with others.

Pointing It Out: Contents of the Writing Portfolio

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED PIECES IN THE 4TH GRADE KIRIS WRITING PORTFOLIO?

The student includes a total of **6** pieces in the portfolio. Any of the following portfolio entries may come from study areas other than English/language arts, but a minimum of one piece of writing must come from another subject area.

- ✔ **Table of Contents**
- ✔ **Student Signature Sheet** - states student ownership of the portfolio and may give permission to use the portfolio for training (optional)
- ✔ **Letter to the Reviewer** *(Student must include one.)*
- ✔ **Personal expressive writing(s)** in the form of
  personal narrative — focuses on one event in the life of the writer
  memoir — focuses on the student's relationship with a person, animal, place, or thing
  (Student may choose one or two.)
- ✔ **Imaginative writing** in the form of short story - poem - play
  (Student may choose one or two.)
- ✔ **Additional writings**, the purpose of which is to
  a. present/support a position, idea, or opinion
  -OR-
  b. tell about a problem and its solution
  -OR-
  c. inform
  (Student may choose one or two.)

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED PIECES IN THE 7TH GRADE KIRIS WRITING PORTFOLIO?

The student includes a total of **6** pieces in the portfolio. Any of the following portfolio entries may come from study areas other than English/language arts, but a minimum of one piece of writing must come from another subject area.

- ✔ **Table of Contents**
- ✔ **Student Signature Sheet** - states student ownership of the portfolio and may give permission to use the portfolio for training (optional)
- ✔ **Letter to the Reviewer** *(Student must include one.)*
- ✔ **Personal expressive writing(s)** in the form of
  - personal narrative — focuses on one event in the life of the writer
  - memoir — focuses on the student's relationship with a person, animal, place, or thing
  - vignette — captures a moment in time in the writer's life and focuses on painting a picture with words

  (Student may choose one or two.)
- ✔ **Imaginative writing** in the form of short story - poem - script

  (Student may choose one or two.)
- ✔ **Additional pieces of writing**, the purpose of which is to achieve any one or more of the following purposes:
  a. predict an outcome
  b. defend a position
  c. analyze or evaluate a situation, person, place or thing
  d. solve a problem
  e. explain a process or concept
  f. draw a conclusion
  g. create a model

  (Student may choose two or three.)

WHAT ARE THE REQUIRED PIECES IN THE 12TH GRADE KIRIS WRITING PORTFOLIO?

The student includes a total of **6** pieces in the portfolio. Any of the following portfolio entries may come from study areas other than English/language arts, but a minimum of two pieces of writing must come from another subject area.

- ✔ **Table of Contents**
- ✔ **Student Signature Sheet** - states student ownership of the portfolio and may give permission to use the portfolio for training (optional)
- ✔ **Letter to the Reviewer** *(Student must include one.)*
- ✔ **Personal expressive writing(s)** in the form of
  - personal narrative — focuses on one event in the life of the writer
  - memoir — focuses on the student's relationship with a person, animal, place, or thing
  - vignette — captures a moment in time in the writer's life and focuses on painting a picture with words
  - personal essay — focuses on a central idea supported by a variety of incidents in the writer's life

  (Student must include one.)
- ✔ **Imaginative writing** in the form of short story - poem - script/play *(Student must include one.)*
- ✔ **Additional pieces of writing**, the purpose of which is to achieve any one or more of the following purposes:
  a. predict an outcome
  b. defend a position
  c. analyze or evaluate a situation, person, place or thing
  d. solve a problem
  e. explain a process or concept
  f. draw a conclusion
  g. create a model

  (Student must include three.)

Why is the Table of Contents Important?

The Table of Contents for the Writing Portfolio is a required portfolio entry and has two purposes. The first purpose is to provide students with the experience of organizing their best work to present to an audience. The second purpose is to serve as a reference for the scorer/reader.

What Kinds of Writing Do Portfolio Pieces Represent?

The selections in the *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* reflect an emphasis on writing for a variety of purposes. At the heart of the experience is a variety of higher level thinking skills students must exercise. Students select from their writing collections the pieces which show their best work.

In the real world, writers use information for a purpose. Some writing found in the *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* places emphasis on the kinds of writing people do in a working/communicating world, such as editorials, business letters, and reports. In fact, real world purposes and audiences provide the best motivation for students' writing. Students see a reason for the writing and have ownership in what they have to say.

Writers also use information to create. The thinking required for this kind of writing has produced advancements in our world such as electric lights, space travel, and technology, and should be promoted in schools. The *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* asks students to write poetry, short stories, or other fictional pieces to extend creative thinking skills.

To develop meaning and understanding for themselves and others, writers reflect on their own experiences. All successful people in the world think reflectively about what they did, how they did it, and what they have learned. Examples of reflective writing in the *Kentucky Writing Portfolio* include the personal narrative, personal vignette, memoir, personal essay, and letter to the reviewer.

What are the Specific Pieces of Writing Which Students May Include In Their Portfolios?

The Letter to the Reviewer is a self-assessment written by students to discuss their growth as writers and reflect on the pieces in the portfolio.

A personal narrative is writing about one significant incident experienced by the writer.

A personal essay focuses on a central idea supported by a variety of incidents in the writer's life.

A personal vignette captures a moment in time in the life of the writer and focuses on painting a picture with words rather than telling a complete story.

A memoir reflects on the relationship of the writer and a particular person (usually older), animal, place, or thing, supported by memories of specific experiences.

A short story is a piece of fiction that contains some, but maybe not all, of the following elements: plot, setting, character development, theme and point of view.

A play or script is written text of a stageplay, screenplay, radio or television broadcast, commercial or video.

What are the Specific Pieces of Writing Which Students May Include In Their Portfolios?

A prediction of an outcome: The writer uses information to project the outcome of a future event or situation.

A defense of a position: The writer forms an opinion and supports that position with related facts.

A solution to a problem: The writer defines a problem, explores possibilities, and explains a possible solution.

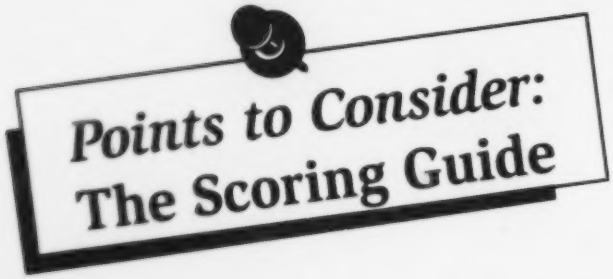
An analysis or evaluation of a situation, person, place or thing: To analyze, the writer examines each part of a selected topic and brings meaning to the whole. To evaluate, the writer makes a judgment based on the information presented.

An explanation of a process or concept: The writer writes for a real or imagined situation to help the reader understand a process, key concept, or principle.

A conclusion: The writer makes decisions based on information gathered from a variety of sources.

A proposal or creation of a model: The writer designs a plan for a specific purpose.

NOTE: Writing from content areas other than English/language arts is required in the 4th, 7th and 12th grade portfolios since writing in the "real" world is not limited to any particular subject area.



Unlike a grade of A or B, your child's score on the Writing Portfolio can give you information about the characteristics most often observed in your child's writing. When you and your child know what to look for, you also know what needs improvement. The *Kentucky Holistic Scoring Guide*, below, lists the qualities of effective writing under "Proficient," the goal for all Kentucky students.

NOVICE

- Limited awareness of audience and/or purpose
- Minimal idea development; limited and/or unrelated details
- Random and/or weak organization
- Incorrect and/or ineffective sentence structure
- Incorrect and/or ineffective language
- Errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization disproportionate to length and complexity of writing

APPRENTICE

- Some evidence of communicating with an audience for a specific purpose; some lapses in focus
- Unelaborated idea development; unelaborated and/or repetitious details
- Lapses in organization and/or coherence
- Simplistic and/or awkward sentence structure
- Simplistic and/or imprecise language
- Some errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization that do not interfere with communication

PROFICIENT

- Focused on a purpose; communicates with audience; evidence of voice and/or suitable tone
- Depth of idea development supported by elaborated, relevant details
- Logical, coherent organization
- Controlled and varied sentence structure
- Acceptable, effective language
- Few errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization relative to the length and complexity

DISTINGUISHED

- Establishes a purpose and maintains clear focus; strong awareness of audience; evidence of distinctive voice and/or appropriate tone
- Depth and complexity of ideas supported by rich, engaging, and/or pertinent details; evidence of analysis, reflection, insight
- Careful and/or subtle organization
- Variety in sentence structure and length enhances effect
- Precise and/or rich language
- Control of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

Since learning to write is as much a developmental process as learning to read, you can look for characteristics to determine if your child is growing as a writer. The *Kentucky Holistic Scoring Guide* lists these growth indicators as you read through the categories of Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, and Distinguished.

For example, inexperienced writers may show a limited awareness of why and for whom they are writing. When they have more learning experiences and thus more growth as writers, "some evidence," but perhaps with "some lapses," may appear more frequently. Successful (proficient) writers will remain "focused on a purpose" throughout the writing. Parents, students, and teachers should understand these growth points toward becoming better writers.

How Can Parents Help?

The six criteria below are those considered when portfolio writings are scored. These are generally accepted characteristics of "effective writing" you'll find anywhere.

Ask questions about Purpose/Audience.

- What do you want to write about? Why?
- Who will want/need to read this?
- What do you want the audience to know or do?
- How will you present it to the audience?

Ask questions about Idea Development/Support.

- What are the details and examples you have used? Do they help the audience understand completely?
- Are they the best details and examples for your audience? for your purpose?
- Have you explained important ideas?
- Do your examples support the main ideas?
- Do your details make the ideas clearer?

Ask questions about Organization.

- Did you stick with your plan throughout the piece of writing?
- Does the order of the ideas make sense?
- Does all of your information fit together?
- Do your ideas flow easily from one to another?
- Will your reader be able to follow all of your thinking?

Ask questions about Sentences.

- Do your sentences have different lengths? different beginnings? different structures? Or do they sound too much alike?
- Do your sentences express complete thoughts?

Ask questions about Language.

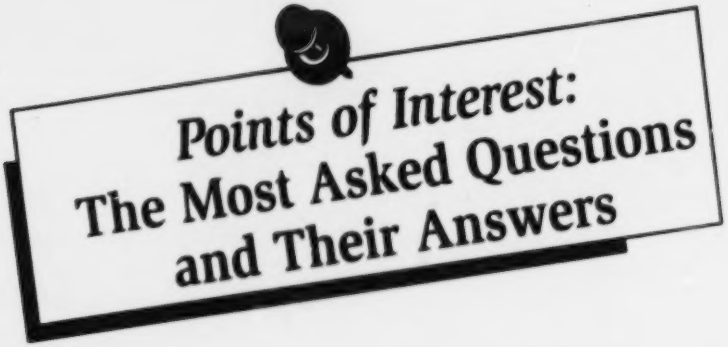
- Have you used a variety of words to make your meaning clear?
- Do the words say what you mean?
- Are all of your words used correctly?

Ask questions about Correctness.

- Have you made any mistakes in spelling?
- Do you see any punctuation problems?
- Have you used capital letters in the needed places?

**NOTE: If you focus on errors before the writing is completely developed in the areas above, you may keep your child from doing his or her best writing. However, these skills should receive attention before the writing is "published" for an audience.*

Examples of Kentucky students' writing at grades 4, 7, and 12 are available for you to examine at your child's school. These examples, called benchmarks, give a clearer picture of what the characteristics look like as children develop skill. Teachers use the examples for comparison when they score student writing. Students use the examples to learn about their own writing skills. You can use the examples to help your child become a better thinker and writer.



Points of Interest: The Most Asked Questions and Their Answers

Q: Who developed the Kentucky Writing Portfolio and the Holistic Scoring Guide?

A: The Writing Advisory Committee, made up of Kentucky educators from all parts of the state.

Q: Is correctness important in portfolio pieces?

A: Yes. Students should learn and practice correct spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation skills in the context of pieces of writing. This means they use the lessons taught to proofread and correct pieces of writing that they are preparing for publication. Research has shown that grammar taught by textbook drill not tied to daily use does little to improve children's speaking and writing. For more information see the editing section in "Making the Point: The Writing Process" and correctness in "Points to Consider: The Scoring Guide."

Q: Who scores portfolios?

A: Any teacher or administrator who has been trained to score.

Q: Should my child be writing in all classes?

A: Yes. Writing is a tool for learning. Students in all classes should be engaged in writing-to-learn activities, writing to demonstrate learning, and writing which goes through a process to produce pieces for a real audience and a real purpose.

Q: How will I know my child's portfolio score?

A: Official portfolio scores, along with other KIRIS data, are released to schools and made available to parents through the counseling office. Teachers are encouraged to discuss scores and suggestions for improvement with students.

Q: What is the difference between a writing folder and a writing portfolio?

A: Student writing folders are holding bins for many pieces of writing in various stages. They show student progress and provide students with chances to review work and make changes. In contrast, *Kentucky Writing Portfolios* contain a purposeful student selection of six entries. They give reviewers an opportunity to determine student performance levels based upon "best works."

Q: Do the pieces for the portfolio have to be typed?

A: No. The writing should be neat and legible. Students may use many methods to produce published pieces (pen or pencil, word processors, or typewriters), but whichever method is used, the student must do the writing, word processing, or typing.

Q: Are NOVICE, APPRENTICE, PROFICIENT, and DISTINGUISHED the same as grades?

A: No. These assessment levels relate directly to the criteria of the *Kentucky Holistic Scoring Guide*, used for large scale assessment. Grades are based on criteria established by individual teachers.

Q: Who besides the teacher will see my child's writing?

A: The primary intended audience of individual pieces, portfolio scorers, and any other person with whom the child chooses to share may see your child's writing.

Q: Will I get a copy of my child's portfolio?

A: Your child's original portfolio must be kept at the school. However, you may request a copy of it.

Q: May my child work on the portfolio at home?

A: Yes. While the writing should have a direct connection to classroom instruction, parents may assist children during the writing/learning process (see specific suggestions in "Making the Point: The Writing Process" and "How Can Parents Help?").

Q: How can I help my child become a better writer?

A: The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) makes the following suggestions:

- Build a climate of words at home. The basis of good writing is good talk. Encourage your child to talk about subjects of interest.
- Encourage your child to read, especially reading which is self-selected. Let your child see you read and invite discussions about what you are both reading.
- Praise your child's efforts at writing. Resist the tendency to focus on errors of spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical parts of writing. Be primarily interested in content. Emphasize your child's successes. For every error your child makes, there are a dozen things done well.
- Encourage your child to write away for information, free samples, travel brochures, etc. For suggestions about where to write and how to write, purchase a copy of the helpful U.S. Postal booklet *All About Letters.*
- Be alert to occasions when your child can be involved in writing. Writing for real purposes is rewarding, and the daily activities of families present many opportunities for purposeful writing (grocery lists, telephone messages, notes to family members).
- Ask to see your child's writing. Express interest but remember to allow your child to decide if and when to share.

(Selected comments from "How To Help Your Child Become A Better Writer," a brochure from NCTE)
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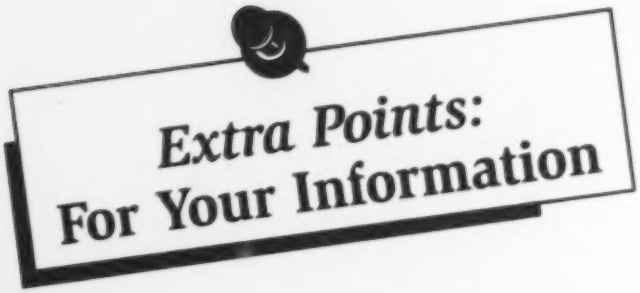

Children learn when they know we care. Parents and educators must work together to help students meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We welcome your participation, point-of-view, comments, suggestions, and/or questions concerning writing. For more information, please feel free to contact us.

KENTUCKY WRITING PROGRAM

Starr Lewis, Director
Kentucky Writing Program
Kentucky Department of Education
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
(502) 564-9853
(502) 564-7749 Fax
e-mail: slewis@kde.state.ky.us

WRITING PORTFOLIO CONSULTANTS

Mary Alice Harmon
Kentucky Department of Education
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
(502) 564-9853
(502) 564-7749 Fax
e-mail: maharmon@kde.state.ky.us

Claudia Runge
Kentucky Department of Education
500 Mero Street
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
(502) 564-9853
(502) 564-7749 Fax
e-mail: crunge@kde.state.ky.us

KENTUCKY WRITING PROGRAM WRITING CONSULTANTS

Pam Ladd
PO Box 2550
401 Walter Jetton Blvd.
Paducah, Kentucky 42002
(502) 444-5641 Phone and Fax
(502) 444-5607 Fax

Ellen Lewis
Jefferson County Schools
Gheens Academy
4425 Preston Hwy.
Louisville, Kentucky 40213
(502) 485-6062
(502) 485-3897 Fax

Sharon Hatton
Carnegie Center
251 W. 2nd Street
Lexington, Kentucky 40507
(602) 225-9249
(602) 281-1151 Fax

Margaret Nickell
Region 7 Service Center
150 University Boulevard
Morehead, Kentucky 40351
(606) 783-5372
(606) 783-5375 Fax

Susan Miller
3120 Creekside Drive
Louisville, Kentucky 40241
(502) 429-5322
(502) 451-9594 Fax

Shannon Tolbert
Center for Support Services
1805 Second Street
Henderson, Kentucky 42420
(502) 831-5010
(502) 831-5016 Fax

Bonnie Hall
Region 8 Service Center
100 Resource Drive
Prestonsburg, Kentucky 41653
(602) 886-0205
(602) 886-1509 Fax

Jean Roberts
707 N. Second Street
Richmond, Kentucky 40475
(606) 624-4529
(606) 624-4581 Fax

Donna Vincent
Muhlenberg County Board of Education
Box 167, Hwy. 62 East
Greenville, Kentucky
(502) 338-7256
(502) 338-0529 Fax

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